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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

28 February 1986

NOTE FOR: The NIC

FROM: VCs/NIC

SUBJECT: On Concept Papers, Key Questions, and TORs

1. A few additional thoughts on these subjects--in the interests of (1) improving Concept Papers/TORs, (2) formalizing our discussions to date on these procedures, (3) agreeing on definitions, and (4) incorporating some useful suggestions given us by Bill Leonhart.

2. Key Questions, to be introduced at the close of each Concept Paper, are the central or pivotal issues involved in a given Estimate, the basic focus of that product's purpose and message. Were a crisis situation brewing in Ruritania, for example, Key Questions for a SNIE might be (1) the degree of likelihood that the King will be overthrown in the near future by thieves answerable to Princess Carlotta; (2) the likely cohesion, policies, orientation, and hold on the public of her successor regime; and (3) the so-what for US interests.

3. Identification of these Key Questions is in itself a highly creative process that forces us to reduce issues to the fundamentals in our own mind. They should receive tentative answers at the TOR coordination meeting. Ultimately the Key Judgments should answer the Key Questions and represent the standard against which the paper is judged to have met its purpose or not.

4. In all Estimates, many important questions feed into such Key Questions, are subsumed in them, and must be dealt with in the research and analysis attending the Estimate's drafting. In the Ruritanian case, typical important questions would include the political-military capabilities, intentions, and toughness/effectiveness of the major players; the influence on the situation of the precipitous fall of the zlotny (R.); the machinations of the Carlotta camp with the Vanlandinghams; the likely effect a Ghibelline raid upon neighboring Guelphia would have on the R. situation; etc.

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5. Such important questions should be the framework about which TORs are organized, drawn, and presented. TORs thus should list the principal important questions to be considered, with indicated sub-questions which feed into each of the TOR's important questions, as appropriate. TORs are not to be an outline of the Estimate, or a table of contents. Nor does answering all the important questions of a paper necessarily mean that the Key Questions have been explicitly answered.

6. Additionally, Concept Papers should in all cases begin with an explanation of where the exercise came from, and what its purpose is. For example: "This SNIE was specially requested by Inspector Clouseau. Building on the previous (1906) general purpose NIE on Ruritania, the present issue-oriented Estimate is being produced to help guide Amb. Terry Bascomb's upcoming special mission." Or: "This SNIE, initiated by NIO-Mitteleuropa, is intended to support an upcoming Executive Branch re-examination of concessional aid to Ruritania."

7. In short, the chief aims of these exercises are: (a) concentration of our estimative work on the essentials of the problems involved, (b) clarity and sharpness of presentation/impact, and (c) brevity.

Hal Ford

Graham E. Fuller

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